

Impressionism & Scotland / Exhibition at the National Galleries of Scotland  
1 Votes

National Galleries of Scotland / Edinburgh  
Impressionism & Scotland  
Exhibition > 12 October 2008

Royal Scottish Academy Building

The National Galleries of Scotland present Impressionism & Scotland, an exhibition of over 100 paintings, pastels and watercolours, which explore the Scottish taste for Impressionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and assess the impact of modern European art on Scottish art and artists.

Sir John Lavery

Sir John Lavery  
The Tennis Party, 1885  
Oil on Canvas  
77 x 183.5 cms  
© Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums

Highlights include Renoir's The Bay of Naples (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), the first Impressionist painting to be bought by a Scot; Degas's L'Absinthe (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which was 'hissed' when it came up for auction in the early 1890s, due to its 'depraved' subject-matter; and Sir John Lavery's The Tennis Party (Aberdeen Art Gallery), a rare example of Scottish modern life painting.

Other major Impressionist works are on loan from private and public collections in the UK, Germany, the USA and Australia. Artists represented in the show include Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin, Manet, Matisse, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley, Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh, as well as the Glasgow Boys and the Scottish Colourists.

Edgar Degas

Edgar Degas  
Dans un cafe: L'Absinthe, 1875-6  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris  
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Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec  
At the Café La Mie, 1891  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
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In the late nineteenth century Scotland was a powerful industrial nation and Glasgow was second city of the British Empire. A rising generation of rich industrialist and mercantile collectors developed a taste for avant-garde European art, many of them acquiring works which are now of international importance. For example, in Aberdeen collectors initially forged links between the artists of the Hague School - the so-called Dutch 'Impressionists' - and Scots artists such as George Reid and William McTaggart.

Many Scots collectors also acquired the work of Camille Corot and the artists of the Barbizon School; and in Glasgow - under the influence of the art dealer Alexander Reid - they were among the first to invest in the work of Degas, Manet, Monet, Renoir and Whistler. Pictures acquired by such collectors were frequently lent to public exhibitions and were seen by contemporary Scottish artists.

Exposed to these works in the 1880s and 1890s, artists of the 'Glasgow School', such as John Lavery, James Guthrie and E.A. Walton, began to emulate their European contemporaries. They painted in the open air, depicting both rural and modern-life subjects, but they avoided the controversial café scenes of Manet and Degas. They were commonly referred to by critics, sometimes pejoratively, as 'Impressionists', even though their essentially tonal style of painting was quite different from the 'scientific' Impressionism of Monet and his contemporaries.

Sir James Guthrie

Sir James Guthrie  
A Hind's Daughter, 1883  
Oil on canvas  
91.5 x 76.2cm  
© National Gallery of Scotland

In the early twentieth century a new generation of artists emerged in Scotland - S.J. Peploe, J.D. Fergusson, Leslie Hunter and F.C.B. Cadell, later known as the Scottish Colourists. These artists all travelled to France and their early interest in Manet and Impressionism was soon superseded by a fascination with the decorative expressionism of Matisse and the 'Fauves'. After the First World War Scottish collectors learned to appreciate the Colourists' brilliant colour and expressive handling and, partly through their influence, turned to Post-Impressionism, acquiring works by Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec and Matisse.

This exhibition highlights some astonishing parallels between the work of Dutch, French and Scottish artists, whose work will be hung side by side: Corot and Walton; Bastien-Lepage and Guthrie; Degas and Crawhall; Manet and Fergusson; Matisse and Hunter. It demonstrates that, in addition to absorbing these powerful influences, Scottish artists developed their own instinctive brand of Impressionism, quite unlike the more analytical approach of the French Impressionists.

Arthur Melville

Arthur Melville  
A Peasant Girl, 1880  
Falmouth Art Gallery, Cornwall  
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George Henry

George Henry  
The Milliner's Window, 1894  
Private Collection  
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'This exciting exhibition will bring us the best of both worlds. Not only will it bring back to Scotland major works by the Impressionists which were once here, it will also tell us a great deal about a very important episode in the development of our own national school of painting.'

Michael Clarke, Director of the National Gallery of Scotland

'It is a privilege to be involved with this marvellous exhibition during our centenary year, an appropriate parallel as some of the pieces on display are around 100 years old. The works in the exhibition also demonstrate the vision of many Scottish collectors, and the great talent of Scottish artists.'

Alex Callander, joint senior partner, Baillie Gifford & Co

Catalogue  
The exhibition is accompanied by a book, Impressionism and Scotland by Frances Fowle, with additional essays by Vivien Hamilton and Jennifer Melville, price £14.95, and a smaller souvenir guide (£4.95).

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